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HOW TO PREPARE AN EXPOSITORY SERMON ON  
PSALMS XLII. AND XLIII.\*

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In preparing an article on the above topic the writer is explicitly informed that what is required is "not an expository sermon," nor "an outline of an expository sermon, but directions to the ordinary minister how to prepare such a sermon." The present article, then, is not a disquisition on the advantages of expository preaching, nor general directions for this department of homiletics. It aims at nothing farther than giving suggestions that may be helpful in working out an expository sermon on one particular section of Scripture. Possibly, however, the solution of one problem may assist in the solution of many others.

The first requisite in preparing an expository sermon on this passage of Scripture, or any other, is a clear idea of what an expository sermon is. It is not a succession of rambling remarks on heterogeneous subjects suggested by the disjointed words, phrases or sentences of the passage under consideration. It is not an efflorescence of sacred rhetoric or of pious exhortation which hides the text, as a vine hides beneath its own luxuriant foliage the tree over which it climbs. It is not a jejune grammatico-historical dissection of dead words, regardless of the living spirit. Expository preaching involves far more than commonplace exhortation, or critical exegesis. Yet it must not be inferred that a sound and careful exegesis is of no importance. It is the *sine qua non* of expository preaching. A thorough understanding of the writer's environment, together with an accurate analysis of his thoughts and feelings is the foundation on which such a

\*This article is the second in a series of expository hints and suggestions, the first of which, by Professor George B. Stevens, entitled "How to prepare an expository sermon on the Life and Work of Stephen," appeared in the January number of the STUDENT.—THE EDITOR.

sermon rests, and the material out of which it is built. An expository sermon, accordingly, takes some inspired line of thought, or a biographical or historical narrative, and uses it as an illustration of permanent principles which it is the preacher's business to apply to the immediate and specific needs of the people who hear him.

We are now prepared to address ourselves to the two psalms, the forty-second and the forty-third, which form the subject of this paper. Originally they seem to have constituted a single poem, having one inscription, an identical situation, character, and refrain. They are therefore considered together.

I. *Historical Situation.*

(a) Authorship and Date. The inscription, which originally embraced both psalms, attributes them to the "Sons of Korah," a Levitic family long and prominently connected with the temple service. The author seems to have been a priest who had formerly been employed about the altar (43: 4). He was not only a poet, but a musician skillful in the use of the harp (*ib.*). Time and again he had marched at the head of the happy processions of pilgrims that gathered at the great national feasts at Jerusalem. As they went up to the house of God his powerful voice had led their lofty songs of praise and thanksgiving (42: 4\*). As the tone of the psalm is so strongly Davidic, and as it fits so admirably into the well known facts of David's flight at Absalom's rebellion, it has been conjectured to be the composition of some Korahite priestly singer who followed in David's train. There is no farther clue to the date.

(b) Place and Environment. Verse 6 fixes the place of composition in "the Land of Jordan," near "the Hermons," possibly in "the little hill" country skirting the foot of this range. In the intervening valleys mountain-torrents swept down with a great rush and roar, forming in many places lofty cataracts. Possibly the writer was near one of these cataracts (incorrectly rendered "water-spouts," 42: 7) whose

\* The references in the forty-second psalm are to the English Version. The Hebrew has twelve verses instead of eleven, the inscription being numbered as the first verse.

“voice” reminded him of ocean-billows breaking on a rocky coast. He was either a fugitive escaping from some overwhelming disaster in his own land and finding refuge among hostile heathen neighbors, or more likely a captive borne away by some predatory band or victorious army. Enemies, who were never weary of deriding him for his faith in God, surrounded him on every side. Not only was he the object of their bitter mockery, but of their cruel oppression (42:9; 43:2).

2. *The Writer's Mental and Spiritual State.*

(a) Profound Mental Dejection. He was friendless, homeless, intensely out of harmony with his environment, unable to see any way of escape from his troubles, and therefore unutterably wretched. He abandoned himself to a grief so acute that it dissipated his appetite for ordinary food, and his tears became his daily “bread” (42:3). In contrast with his painful surroundings he recalls those festal days when the happy throngs that followed him to the house of God caught up and reëchoed his joyful songs. The bare memory of those golden seasons now plunges his soul into such depths of misery that the reproaches of his enemies seem like pitiless blows that crush his very bones (42:10). Perhaps, too, he had earnestly prayed and eagerly hoped that God would vindicate Himself and His servant by a speedy deliverance. The failure of this hope added a still keener sting to the persistent taunts of his enemies, “Where is thy God?” God seemed to have forgotten him (42:9).

(b) His spiritual state, on the contrary, was one of irrepressible longing after God, and of immovable confidence in Him. Outwardly he might seem to be submerged beneath great floods of adversity, but inwardly he soars into a realm of perfect peace and safety. In his despondency he might be tempted to believe that God had forgotten him and cast him off, but no affliction is so deep and dark as to hide from his eyes the evidences of God's daily care and loving-kindness, and therefore even the silence of the night becomes jubilant with praise (42:8). The temple and its holy service were far away, but He whose presence sanctified the temple was close at hand to hear the prayer of His oppressed servant, to render him justice, to vindicate his cause from the assaults of

wicked and deceitful people (43 : 1), and by means of His light and truth to bring him back with exultant joy to the sanctuary on the holy hill (43 : 3, 4). Again and again he upbraids himself for his dejection of soul, and, as often, cheers himself with the triumphant assurance that in due time he will experience God's help, and praise Him for a glorious deliverance (42 : 5, 11 ; 43 : 5).

3. *The Central Thought in these Psalms.*

(a) The soul's supreme and only satisfying good is God.

(b) This thought is expanded as follows. No outward adversity or affliction compares with the sense of being cast out from God's presence, or of being forgotten by Him. Nor does any outward calamity ever justify a loss of confidence in Him. He may hide Himself for a little while from those who eagerly thirst for His presence, but in His own time and way He will show Himself as their unfailing help in trouble. In a word, dejection of soul is best cured by a firm trust in God.

4. *Analysis of the Central Thought.*

Subdivisions for the sermon may be suggested by the three strophes of the psalm, e. g.,

(a) Longing for God as the source of all spiritual life and joy (42 : 1-6).

(b) Confidence in God notwithstanding overwhelming calamities and the taunts of enemies (7-11).

(c) Prayer to God issuing in deliverance and exultant joy (43 : 1-5).

5. *Application of Central and Subordinate Thoughts.*

The preacher must have an object as well as a subject. Whatever his subject it must be brought into line with the thoughts and experiences of the living men and women before him. He must adapt his theme to their immediate needs. And so in this instance the specific elaboration of the psalmist's thought will depend on the spiritual condition of the congregation addressed. A few such conditions and lines of treatment may be suggested here.

(a) The church may have been led captive by the world. Stripped of its spiritual power, pitied by saints and scorned by sinners, it sits helpless and despondent, recalling past seasons of refreshing when the right hand of the Most High

was revealed. Those were days of abounding spiritual life, of enthusiastic activity, of thanksgiving and praise. Now, on the contrary, God seems to have withdrawn His favor and His power. The church tries this expedient or that, this new form of organization or that, and as a last resort turns its pastor adrift in order to secure one who is warranted to "draw," but all in vain. To a church that has gotten through with such means, that really feels and deplores its spiritual desolation, that earnestly longs for the return of God's favor, and is deeply conscious that its hope and help are in Him alone, this hymn of the Old Testament church is strikingly appropriate. It is crowded with "revival" thoughts.

(b) It describes, furthermore, an experience that is more or less frequent in the life of every true believer. Seasons of spiritual gloom darken the sunshine in the soul. Doubts and fears sweep down like tempests from the sky. "Into each life some rain must fall." The very fact that God seems far away intensifies the soul's irrepressible yearning for fellowship and communion with Him. This psalm voices the deepest cry of every truly religious soul—the cry for the living God.

(c) There may be afflicted ones to comfort. Standing in the shadow of a sore bereavement how often one is tempted to exclaim, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me!" "My tears have been my meat day and night." The cloud of sorrow seems almost to have hidden God's face. Spiritual enemies suggest the thought, "Where is thy God" who could so ruthlessly blot out the light of thy life? To every stricken and troubled heart the words of the psalmist are richly laden with consolation and strength. They seem to say, "Let not your soul be disquieted within you. Never mind if you cannot solve all the mysteries of Providence. Hope thou in God, and thou shalt yet give thanks to Him who, in the midst of thy darkness, is still the health of thy countenance and thy God."

In these, and many other ways, the experience of the psalmist may be made to fit into the experiences of men to-day. The wise preacher will aim to do this by coming into personal contact with his people, and ascertaining their spiritual needs.